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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 003437

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KN KS

SUBJECT: INR A/S FORT, S MEETING WITH MOFAT DEPUTY MINISTER

PARK IN-KOOK

Classified By: DCM Bill Stanton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Over dinner on September 26, Amb. Park In-kook, Deputy Minister of Policy Planning and International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT), agreed with visiting INR Assistant Secretary (A/S) Randall Fort that Japan remained preoccupied with the DPRK abduction issue. Amb. Park thought this issue made it unlikely Japan would make diplomatic headway on other concerns with North Korea. Amb. Park observed that North Korea must feel "betrayed" by China's strong reaction to the July missile launch and said the U.S. needed to "learn lessons" from North Korea's 1998 missile launch, after which the U.S. had initiated talks with North Korea. When dealing with North Korea, he said, countries should use sanctions and engagement in parallel, as the ROK had done after the latest missile launch. He cautioned the five other Six-Party Talks (6PT) countries not to forget the goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula, specifically advising the U.S. to "clean up the Banco Delta Asia case" in order to revive the 6PT. In closing, Amb. Park expressed his appreciation to the U.S. for accepting North Korean refugees, which he called "symbolic." END SUMMARY

WARTIME OPERATIONAL CONTROL (OPCON)

¶2. (C) A/S Fort said that the fact that the U.S. and ROK were even discussing the possibility of transferring wartime operational control (OPCON) to the ROK was a sign of a mature relationship. He noted that OPCON was not nearly the emotional issue in the U.S. that it was in the ROK. Amb. Park remarked that "strategic flexibility" had been misinterpreted as a possible USFK withdrawal from the peninsula, igniting the issue, but he understood the concept was not related to troop reduction.

JAPAN-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

¶3. (C) Having come directly from a visit to Japan, A/S Fort described the vehemence that Japanese contacts had expressed toward North Korea over its abduction of Japanese citizens. He noted that it was rare for the Japanese to be so

emotionally charged to the point that it drove policy. John Merrill, INR Northeast Asia Division Chief, who accompanied A/S Fort on the visit, noted that the abduction issue had been among the biggest news stories for more than a year in Japan, adding that, while Japanese outrage was understandable, the intensity of the public's feeling was somewhat puzzling. Amb. Park agreed, observing that as long as Japan remained preoccupied with the abduction issue, it could not make diplomatic progress with North Korea. He noted that Japan insisted on abduction language in every diplomatic document it produced. A/S Fort remarked that Japanese diplomats would like more flexibility to pursue other diplomatic options. Kim Jong-il believed that his admission that North Korea had abducted Japanese was a breakthrough, so he considered the issue closed. He hadn't expected the Japanese reaction would be to impose new "shackles," and this had caused him to withdraw from engagement with Japan. Japan would not rest until it received every last trace of remains. Nam Gwan-pyo, MOFAT Director General of Policy Planning, who also participated in the meeting, agreed that Kim Jong-il had made it clear he won't do anymore on this issue. He noted that in terms of North Korean policy, Japan put the same weight on the abduction issue as the nuclear issue, so it was hard to take Japan seriously. He mentioned the announcement that Japan's Prime Minister Abe would appoint Kyoko Nakayama as special advisor on the abduction issue.

NORTH KOREAN MISSILE LAUNCH

¶4. (C) Turning to the July 5 North Korean missile test launch, Amb. Park said the DPRK had learned lessons following the 1998 missile launch. One week after those tests, the USG proposed reopening dialogue with North Korea and sent an envoy a few months later. North Korea clearly saw this as a model when it tested its missiles in July, he suggested, and we could "learn lessons" from North Korea's actions.

¶5. (C) Nam added that after July's launch, many wondered why North Korea tested several different kinds of missiles. He noted that scuds could reach USFK installations and that Nodongs could reach Japan. So this was North Korea's way of telling the U.S. and Japan, "If you continue sanctions, we have options." Amb. Park wondered about the level of technology of the missiles, given the failure of the Taepodong test. Merrill said that North Korea seemed to be on a self-imposed missile launch ban while there were talks with the U.S., but in the absence of U.S. talks, decided to launch. He noted that North Korea must have been surprised at the world's reaction, especially that of China. Amb. Park agreed, saying that North Korea felt betrayed by China, adding that there were "rumors" that China was also actively penalizing North Korea. He said the U.S. needs to encourage China's continuing involvement, since it was the most feasible intermediary to deal with North Korea. He remarked that the U.S. had lost a good chance to negotiate with North Korea 10 years ago. It should have opened its doors then, when it would not have had to compete with China for influence.

POSSIBLE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR TEST

¶6. (C) A/S Fort asked Amb. Park what the ROK's reaction would be to a possible nuclear test by North Korea. (NOTE: This meeting took place one week before North Korea's Oct. 3 announcement that it would test a nuclear weapon. END NOTE.)

Amb. Park noted that after the July missile launch, the ROK punished North Korea by cutting fertilizer and rice aid to the tune of \$350 million. He said this was the start of "virtual sanctions," calling it the most critical implementation of UNSC 1695. He compared this strong action to the lack of sanctions during President Kim Dae-jung's administration, when they had to consider the Sunshine Policy. "Engagement and sanctions should proceed in parallel," he said, "or else we would have nothing to cut." A/S Fort related how one of his Japanese interlocutors said

that if North Korea met certain conditions regarding the abductions and nuclear proliferation, Japan would be bound to a 1997 reparations agreement by which North Korea would reap billions of dollars. The official thought that if North Korea addressed the abduction issue alone, Japan would probably be willing to meet the reparations agreement. To boot, this would create huge U.S.-Japan bilateral problems. But North Korea was too stupid to realize this, the official added.

RESTARTING SIX-PARTY TALKS

¶ 7. (C) Amb. Park gave his personal outlook on reviving 6PT: Japan had virtually given up on 6PT because it was so focused on the abduction issue; the ROK and China were both preoccupied with other issues; Russia was a question mark; and the U.S. had another agenda in pursuing Banco Delta Asia (BDA) sanctions. He pointed out that the five countries might be forgetting the goal of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. He likened North Korea to a "stem cell," providing the right conditions for other countries in the region to develop a multilateral security system, noting that the U.S. also sat at the table even though it was not in the region. "I seriously advise you to clean up the BDA case in order to pursue 6PT," he stated.

NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

¶ 8. (C) Amb. Park said he "highly appreciated" the U.S. policy of accepting North Korean refugees. He thought it was very symbolic and urged the U.S. to think about more fundamental preparations for North Korean refugees, as it had for Vietnamese and Cuban refugees. A/S Fort said that in those cases, the numbers justified the preparations; he encouraged Amb. Park to raise this issue with high-level policy makers since INR did not make policy.

FUTURE COLLABORATION

¶ 9. (SBU) Amb. Park said that MOFAT was in the process of creating a division similar to INR and suggested meeting annually with INR. A/S Fort responded enthusiastically, saying that "INR would be only too happy to assist" in sharing both substantive and technical advice. Amb. Park noted that A/S Fort's visit would constitute the first official meeting, and A/S Fort said he hoped it would be the first of many meetings. He also acknowledged the ROK's important contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, calling the ROK an "intrepid ally." Merrill noted that INR had given many briefings to the ROK Embassy in Washington before the Zaytun deployment, and would continue to assist in any way it could.

¶ 10. (U) Participants

United States:

Randall Fort, INR Assistant Secretary
John Merrill, INR Northeast Asia Division Chief
Bill Stanton, DCM
Grace Choi, poloff, notetaker

Korea (all from MOFAT):

Amb. Park In-kook, Deputy Minister, Policy Planning and International Organizations
Nam Gwan-pyo, Director General, Policy Planning
Hahn Choong-hee, Director, North American Division 1
Choe Jong-hyun, Chief, Intelligence Analysis Team

¶ 11. (U) This cable was cleared by A/S Fort.

VERSHBOW